EXTRACT

pfv

(potential for violence)

a one-act play

by

Alex Broun

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“O Vengeance!”

- Hamlet

pfv

was first performed by

Stageworks Theatre

at

Belvoir Street Theatre - Downstairs, Surry Hills, Sydney,

on **the 3rd of July, 1992,**

with the following cast:

THE BOY: **Jeremy Shaw**

THE MAN: **Ken Welsh**

The production was directed by **Patrick Guerrera**
and designed by **David Waller**.

Characters

THE BOY

THE MAN

Time

Summer.

The play takes place on an extremely hot, windless day and night and the following morning.

Scene

A single room shack, somewhere in the outback.

A simple barren room with a dusty floor.

Upstage right a door leads out on to a decaying verandah. To the left of the door is a window with a broken pane. Through it we see the desolate outback countryside – red earth, yellow grass and dying trees – stretching away to the horizon.

Upstage there are a scattering of empty beer cans and a half empty carton. Amongst these are some torn political posters and a few books.

Scene 1. Noon.

WE FIND OURSELVES IN A SIMPLE BARREN ROOM WITH A DUSTY FLOOR.

IN FRONT OF THE WINDOW, ON A STURDY WOODEN CHAIR SITS **THE BOY**. ABOUT 18 YEARS OLD IN JEANS AND FADED SINGLET, HIS HAIR IS UNKEMPT AND HIS SKIN UNTIDY BUT HIS EYES ARE ABLAZE WITH UNKNOWN PURPOSE. HE SIPS FROM A CAN OF BEER.

BEHIND HIM ON THE FLOOR ARE THE REMAINS OF A CARTON AND A SCATTERING OF EMPTIES. **THE BOY** STARES INTENTLY AT ANOTHER SIMILAR CHAIR DOWNSTAGE RIGHT, WHICH IS HOLDING **THE MAN**.

THE MAN IS SITTING ON THE FLOOR, LEGS STRAIGHT OUT AND HIS BACK PRESSED FIRMLY AGAINST THE FRONT OF THE CHAIR. HIS ARMS ARE TIED AROUND THE LEGS OF THE CHAIR WITH THICK OLD ROPE. HIS WRISTS ARE GRAZED AND BLOODY FROM THE GRATING OF ROPE ON SKIN, HIS SHOES ARE SCUFFED, HIS PANTS MUDDY AND HIS SHIRT STAINED WITH SWEAT.

THE MAN'S EYES ARE COVERED BY A LARGE CRUDE BLINDFOLD AND HIS MOUTH IS STUFFED WITH A GAG. **THE MAN** IS NEITHER OVERWEIGHT NOR BALDING BUT WE REALISE HE MUST BE OVER 20 YEARS OLDER THAN HIS "COMPANION". IT IS POSSIBLE, BUT NOT PROBABLE, THEY COULD EVEN BE FATHER AND SON.

THERE IS A LONG SILENCE, SAVE THE NOISE OF THE BUSH. **THE BOY** CONTINUES TO STARE INTENTLY AT THE MAN, OCCASIONALLY SIPPING HIS BEER. EVENTUALLY WE REALISE THAT **THE MAN** IS ASLEEP.

THE BOY STANDS AND WALKS TO THE DOOR. HE OPENS IT WIDE THEN SLAMS IT LOUDLY. **THE MAN** JERKS INTO LIFE AND WRITHES VIOLENTLY, DESPERATELY TRYING TO FREE HIMSELF.

THE BOY SLOWLY MOVES CLOSER TO **THE MAN** WATCHING HIM STRUGGLE. GRADUALLY **THE MAN**, OVERCOME BY PURE EXHAUSTION, CEASES TO MOVE. **THE BOY** STANDS OVER HIM.

SILENCE.

BOY: You are extremely impolite. In fact you border on rude. In some countries your behaviour could even be classed as unpardonable. You would be outcast, discarded, solitary. I, on the other hand, would be a man to be respected. I have made an effort. I have spoken to you, chatted with you, shared stories and anecdotes - I have endeavoured to entertain. And you, you have not even had the decency to repay my kindness in the slightest. For an entire day and an entire night, through a most enjoyable road trip, a delightful bush stroll and a serene evening of reflection you have not deemed me worthy of a single syllable. Not one

BOY: (CONT) utterance. Nothing. I have questioned you, cajoled you, tickled your fancy with tidbits of delight and you cannot even summon up the crudest of replies. You have remained defiantly speechless. At first I was bemused, enticed, somewhat beguiled by your lack of response, but as time passed, as your silence continued, my mood began to alter. I started to become annoyed, angry, increasingly pissed off. Now I find myself at boiling point. My benevolent nature has been stretched to the limit. If your silence is not broken soon I may be forced into a most unpleasing act. A split second of retaliation. A gift of pain. [SHORT PAUSE] But then, I am a docile person. Violence is not something I enjoy or encourage. So I am willing to give you one last chance. An opportunity for salvation. A hope of forgiveness. Just say something, anything. No matter how puerile, no matter how obscure. One intelligible sound and your totally unacceptable behaviour of the last twenty four hours will be ancient history. The slightest flicker of a response. I'm asking you nicely. I'm pleading with you. I'm on my knees begging. Just a little sign. One hint that you possess a single cell of humanity.

THE BOY PAUSES AND WAITS ON HIS KNEES FOR A RESPONSE FROM **THE MAN**. AFTER AWHILE **THE MAN** EMITS A MUFFLED MOAN. A PAUSE. **THE MAN** MOANS AGAIN. SILENCE.

BOY: What was that? What was that erroneous dribble? Was that speech? Was that the just reward for my countless endeavours? [STANDING] Disappointment. Rejection. Betrayal. A chance, a hope, an act of charity - abused, disgraced, spat back in my face. Now I'm really peeved. I'm disgruntled. I'm irritated. I am urged into action. Prepare for punishment.

THE BOY GOES TO THE BACK AND RUMMAGES THROUGH THE CANS. **THE MAN** JERKS IN HIS ROPES WILDLY, DESPERATELY, TRYING TO BREAK FREE. **THE BOY** CONTINUES TO RUMMAGE LOUDLY THROUGH THE CANS SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING.

SUDDENLY, AMIDST THE STRUGGLING, **THE MAN** RAISES ONE LEG AND BANGS IT ON THE GROUND HARD. THE RUMMAGING CONTINUES. **THE MAN** BANGS HIS LEG ON THE FLOOR AGAIN. **THE BOY** STOPS AND LOOKS UP, LISTENING INTENTLY.

BOY: What was that? Do my ears deceive me? What did I hear?

THERE IS A SILENCE. **THE MAN** RAISES HIS LEG AND BANGS IT ON THE GROUND ONCE MORE. **THE BOY** SIGHS.

BOY: Enlightenment has come. Salvation has been earned. An effort has been made. Small, insignificant, hardly noteworthy but an effort has been made. You have justified my patience. My tolerance is restored, somewhat momentarily one imagines, but restored. Congratulations. Well done. You deserve a beer.

THE BOY TAKES A BEER FROM THE CARTON AND PLACES IT ON THE FLOOR WELL IN FRONT OF **THE MAN**.

BOY: I'll just leave it here for you. Enjoy.

THE BOY RETURNS TO HIS CHAIR AND SITS. HE RAISES HIS CAN OF BEER.

BOY: Cheers.

HE DRINKS.

BLACKOUT.

Scene 2 - Afternoon

THE MAN, STILL BOUND, GAGGED AND BLINDFOLDED, SITS DOWNSTAGE WITH HIS HEAD RAISED, STRAINING FOR A SOUND. **THE BOY** IS ABSENT. A LONG PAUSE.

THE BOY ENTERS FROM THE VERANDAH WHERE HE HAS BEEN READING IN THE SUN. HE IS BARE CHESTED AND HIS SINGLET HANGS FROM HIS JEANS. HE STANDS LOOKING AT THE MAN AND DROPS THE THICK BOOK IN HIS HAND ON TO THE FLOOR. **THE MAN** TENSES.

SUDDENLY, FOR NO APPARENT REASON **THE BOY** GOES TO **THE MAN** AND REMOVES THE GAG. HE THEN RETIRES TO THE BACK OF THE STAGE. **THE MAN** RELAXES SLIGHTLY AS **THE BOY** MOVES AWAY. **THE BOY** WAITS, THEN:

BOY: Thank you would be a start. But then how could anyone expect a man like you, a man devoid of etiquette, to suddenly discover a code of conduct. [APPROACHING **THE MAN**] Oh dear. Look at you. You're suffering. You are in pain. Your mouth is dry, your lips are parched, your whole body is screaming out for some water, some liquid, something to ease the throbbing in your head. A beer, a cleansing ale, how good that would taste. How magnificent that would make you feel.

THE BOY PICKS UP THE CAN IN FRONT OF **THE MAN** AND OPENS IT. HE MOVES SLOWLY CLOSER TO **THE MAN** AND HOLDS THE CAN INCHES FROM HIS MOUTH.

BOY: The froth bubbling out. The ice cold ale begging to be drunk. Satisfaction guaranteed. [PLACING THE CAN AGAINST **THE MAN'S** CHEEK] Feel it on your skin. Imagine it rolling down your throat and quenching the fire in your stomach. You can smell it, you can hear it, you can almost taste it.

THE BOY PULLS THE CAN AWAY AND DRINKS IT HIMSELF.

BOY: Almost.

THE MAN LETS OUT A GROAN OF ANGUISH. HE MOVES HIS MOUTH TRYING TO FORM A WORD.

BOY: What's this? His lips are moving, his mouth is opening and closing but no sound is coming out. A new experience for him. A strange experience, something most unpleasant. He wants to speak, he's desperate to speak but he can't. He strains, he concentrates, he summons up one last effort and right from the bottom of his gut the word comes:

MAN: [HOARSE, BREATHY] Why?

A LONG PAUSE.

BOY: Why? [PAUSE, THEN ANGRY] Why? [STANDING] Well excuse me. Pardon my ignorance. I didn't know you were a member of the Holy Trinity. I was unacquainted with the fact that you are a saint. Have you never done anything in your entire life for which you should be now thus treated? Are you perfect? Is your past spotless? Think. Think back. Remember, if you will. Is there nothing? Nothing at all? One single moment which would justify your current predicament? One event for which you always knew that some day, sometime you'd be brought to judgement?

A LONG PAUSE. **THE BOY** WAITS, THEN:

BOY: Nothing? Well then, I apologise for the inconvenience. I am obviously guilty of a terrible mistake. If you are completely innocent, if you have never committed any crime, if you are totally without sin then let's get this over with. You will pass undeterred into the Kingdom of God. Yours will be everlasting peace. The rope is waiting. The ceremony can begin. Lets not hesitate.

THE BOY PULLS THE CHAIR OUT FREEING **THE MAN'S** ARMS, BUT STILL LEAVING THEM BOUND AT THE WRISTS. **THE BOY** PLACES THE CHAIR IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM UNDER THE ROPE.

MAN: What are you doing?

BOY: I'm placing the chair under the rope. The rope hanging from the ceiling. The rope with a noose in the end.

MAN: What is this all about? What have I done?

BOY: You said you've done nothing. Did you make a mistake? Are you hiding something? Better be quick. Little time remains.

THE BOY PULLS **THE MAN** UP ON TO HIS FEET.

MAN: What do you want from me?

BOY: I don't want anything. I am an angel sent by the Lord to bring you to his side. You who have never sinned.

THE BOY PUSHES **THE MAN** UP ON TO THE CHAIR.

MAN: You can't do this!

BOY: I'm standing you on the chair. Now I'm putting the rope around your neck. Nice and loose. You won't even feel it until it pulls tight.

MAN: Why are you doing this?

BOY: That is for you to tell me. Quickly. The countdown is beginning.

MAN: There's nothing. I have done nothing. What do you want?

BOY: I want the truth. I want you to remember.

MAN: What do you want me to remember?

BOY: Something you can never forget.

MAN: But what?

BOY: Too late. The countdown shall now begin. You who have not sinned, you who have never committed any crime, you who have never brought pain on anyone - your Lord and master is waiting. Ten ...nine...

MAN: [OVER COUNTDOWN] Listen. Is this about money?

BOY: Eight...seven...

MAN: Who are you?

BOY: Six ...five...

MAN: Why are you doing this?

BOY: Four ...three...

MAN: This is insane. I have done nothing.

BOY: Two ...one...

MAN: Stop! Please!

THE BOY PUSHES **THE MAN** OFF THE CHAIR. **THE MAN** FALLS TO THE GROUND. THE UNTIED END OF THE ROPE FALLING DOWN AROUND HIM.

BOY: Oops. Forgot to tie the rope. Maybe next time.

THE MAN LIES ON THE FLOOR SHAKING. **THE BOY** STANDS OVER HIM. LIGHTS FADE.

Scene 3: Sunset

THE BOY HAS TURNED HIS CHAIR AROUND AND HE SITS ASTRIDE IT FACING THE AUDIENCE. **THE MAN** LIES FACE UP UNDERNEATH THE CHAIR, HEAD FIRST TO FRONT, STILL BLINDFOLDED. THE BRACE, BETWEEN THE TWO BACK LEGS OF THE CHAIR, IS PINNED AGAINST **THE MAN'S** NECK. **THE BOY** IS DRINKING A CAN OF BEER. THE GAG HAS BEEN REMOVED.

BOY: I'd like to tell you something. It's quite personal, but I think we've reached a stage in our relationship where we're ready for a little intimate exchange.

MAN: I'm listen -

THE **MAN** IS CUT OFF BY **THE BOY** ROCKING FORWARD ON HIS CHAIR AND PUSHING THE BRACE DOWN ONTO **THE MAN'S** NECK CHOKING HIM.

BOY: No interruptions. (SLIGHT PAUSE) When I was fifteen years old they realised that hope was hopeless. Foster parents could not be found or would not come forward, so, in accordance with the laws governing such matters, I was to be made a Ward of the State. But first I had to be assessed. It had to be determined which of the Minister's institutions would be my home for the next three years. So one Monday morning I sat in a room on a chair, not unlike this one, and waited. After a time a man entered. As he sat opposite me, behind the large metallic desk, my worst fears were confirmed. He was … obese. His chocolate brown slacks were bulging at the seams and the third button on his filthy cream shirt had popped, allowing a horrid portion of hairy white flab to emerge. The angular pattern on his tie was almost impossible to discern amongst the greasy breakfast stains and oily remnants of morning tea. But these horrors paled as one took in the hideous reality above. A huge boyish face saturated with sweat, acne scarred and a heat rash coming on. Dumb bloodshot eyes attempting to hide behind chunky black rimmed glasses. An overgrown moustache and a matt of unwashed hair, both liberally sprinkled with dandruff, completing the disaster. It was lucky I had not eaten for I feel the sight may have been too much for my tender stomach to bear.

THE BOY LEANS FORWARD CRUSHING **THE MAN'S** NECK UNDER THE BRACE. **THE MAN** CHOKES VIOLENTLY, GASPING FOR AIR. EVENTUALLY **THE BOY** LEANS BACK.

BOY: We began with questions of a general nature, ascertaining my knowledge of the world around me. Politics, places, people - multiple choice and short answer. I was confident I performed well. My quiz master noted my answers on specially prepared sheets, adding the occasional observation in his cryptic black scrawl. Then the questions started to take on a more personal flavour. My feelings about my mother and my father - a strange